

## Correction of the type locality of the Pennant-winged Nightjar *Macrodipteryx vexillarius* (Caprimulgidae)

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The genus *Macrodipteryx* contains two Afrotropical nightjar species, both of which are migratory and have been recorded outside their normal ranges as vagrants (Fry *et al.*, 1988, Cleere 1998, 1999). The Standard-winged Nightjar *Macrodipteryx longipennis* breeds in West and Central Africa, and generally moves north in the non-breeding season. The Pennant-winged Nightjar *Macrodipteryx vexillarius* has a more southerly breeding range and moves north to 'winter' in Central Africa. Surprisingly, the type locality for both species is stated to be Sierra Leone, which is within the normal range for the Standard-winged Nightjar, but almost at the extreme limit of vagrancy for the Pennant-winged Nightjar. The type locality for the latter requires discussion and correction (Cleere 1998).

The Pennant-winged Nightjar was illustrated and described by Gould (1838), who also stated 'Little is known respecting this singular species further than it inhabits the islands lying between those of Bourbon and Madagascar; that it is numerous on the shores of the Red Sea and in the Island of Scutra'. Warren (1966) listed specimen 1855.12.19.63 in the British Museum (Natural History) as the holotype, adding that it was an adult male (relaxed mount) from Sierra Leone, collected by J. Barlow and purchased of the Zoological Society of London. This specimen has been the subject of confusion ever since the British Museum received it, and here we aim to clarify the issue.

The oldest label attached to the specimen, which seems to have escaped the attention of earlier authors, is a small piece of cardboard with the registration number and the name of the species on one side, and on the other, the words 'Africa. dupl.' The latter word is clearly an abbreviation of 'duplicate', a term long in use in the Museum to denote a specimen without data and therefore of little or no importance. The entry in the museum register states '63. *Caprimulgus vexillarius* Gld. Type. Red Sea?' and appears to have been written in the same hand, therefore suggesting that it was a single entry which was probably undertaken in 1855. Some early bird register entries were copied from the General Zoology registers, but the collection containing this particular specimen was not. Although the specimen label confirms that it was regarded as a duplicate, it was entered in the register as the type of the species. The locality of 'Red Sea?' is probably taken from the list of locations given by Gould, although why this was chosen over the other localities is unknown. The specimen is a relaxed mount, which had been on display in the galleries prior to its transfer to the type collection. As it was not included in a list of specimens in the collection by

Hartert (1892), it was presumably removed from the gallery some time after then, but the precise time of its removal is unknown.

The second label on the skin is the one that has been quoted and discussed, and was evidently added after the specimen was removed from the gallery. The data on this label, which were supposedly copied from beneath the stand of the mounted specimen, state 'Jas. Barlow Esq., Sierra Leone. Orig. descr. J. Gould Esq., under the name of *Caprimulgus vexilla*'. Following *vexilla* is an almost illegible word 'Lirg' or 'Ling' which looks as if it was intended to be the name of an author, although Sherborn (1922) indicates that no taxon of any bird has ever been described with the specific name *vexilla*.

This specimen and its collection locality were eventually discussed by Sclater & Mackworth-Praed (1919, p. 659 footnote). They drew attention to the information on the second Museum label, which they interpreted as meaning that the specimen had been collected in Sierra Leone, and saw no reason why it should not be accepted as the type of the species and the locality accepted as the type locality. However, even accepting the transcribed information on the label as correct, there is no evidence to link the specimen to Gould. 'Orig. descr. J. Gould Esq.' is more plausibly interpreted as meaning that Gould first described the species, but not that he did so on the basis of this specimen; we have no evidence that it was ever in his possession. The identity of 'Jas. Barlow' has eluded our investigations, as nobody of this name appears in any biographical source available to us. It is not possible, therefore, to say with any certainty that the ascription on the label linking his name with that of Sierra Leone means that the specimen originated there. Many early specimens are known to have been mislabelled, or to have been obtained from a location different from their country of origin.

The type locality of Sierra Leone for the Pennant-winged Nightjar has certainly created problems for subsequent authors. Bannerman (1933) stated 'It is also recorded from Sierra Leone but doubt has been cast on this record', whilst Peters (1940) and Fry *et al.* (1988) simply followed Sclater & Mackworth-Praed (1919) in quoting Sierra Leone as the type locality. That Barlow's specimen originated in Sierra Leone seems increasingly unlikely. Had Gould had a specimen from this country in front of him, it is inconceivable that he would not have mentioned this in his description. Even more significantly, he stated 'the general structure of this species is precisely the same as that of the *Macrodipteryx africanus*, Swains. and it doubtless represents that bird on the opposite side of the African continent'. The range for *M. africanus* (= *M. longipennis*) was described by Swainson (1837) as West Africa, and we do not believe that Gould would have said his new species occurred on the opposite side of the continent if his only specimen also came from West Africa.

We conclude from the foregoing that there is no evidence to support the view that Barlow's specimen is the type of *Macrodipteryx vexillarius*, or that Barlow actually collected his specimen in Sierra Leone. Barlow may not even have been the collector; he may merely have owned the specimen. We believe that the whereabouts of the specimen illustrated and described by Gould remains unknown and possibly

no longer exists. It is unclear why Gould gave the range for this nightjar as islands between Bourbon (=Reunion) and Madagascar, the shores of the Red Sea and the Island of Scutra (=Socotra ?), as it does not appear to have been recorded anywhere in those areas. The bird depicted and described by Gould was an adult male with full pennants and was probably a breeding bird. The post-breeding moult of this species suggests that birds in this plumage are unlikely to be found at the extreme limits of vagrancy (Cleere 1998). In the absence of a valid type specimen, we suggest 'southern Africa' as an acceptable type locality for *Macrodipteryx vexillarius*.

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